The Army and the Drug War: Politics or National Security?

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On 15 July 1986, six US Army Blackhawk helicopters from the 210th Combat Aviation Battalion, 193d Infantry Brigade (Panama), deployed to Bolivia to conduct an operation never before attempted on a large scale by a US Army combat unit. Called Task Force Janus, the unit's mission was to provide air transportation, at the direction of representatives of the US Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) contingent stationed with the US Embassy in La Paz, to Bolivian counterdrug police forces as they sought to locate and destroy cocaine production laboratories. The US Ambassador to Bolivia retained overall responsibility for US involvement in the operation. This JCS-directed operation, called Operation Blast Furnace, came just three months after President Reagan had announced that his Administration was declaring a "war on drugs."

Task Force Janus returned home in November of the same year amid public accolades for a successful operation. But while 22 cocaine labs had been discovered, no cocaine of any significance was seized and no arrests were made. Illicit drug production in Bolivia was severely disrupted while the US military was in country, but it quickly returned to a near-normal output once the Americans had gone home.

Only a few days after the task force departed Bolivia, a political cartoon appeared in one of the major US newspapers. It showed the sky filled with US helicopters leaving Bolivia, while the caption between two of the pilots read, "This reminds me of Vietnam. We go in with a large force, accomplish almost nothing, declare victory, then go home."[1] For me, that cartoon was the catalyst for more than a year's worth of wrestling with a number of questions. Did Operation Blast Furnace have any real significance? How do you define success in a counterdrug operation? Did Blast Furnace have any

connection to our own national security or was it just an inconsequential move on a political chessboard? Should the Army be involved in counterdrug operations in the future or should that remain the domain of civilian law enforcement agencies? Since I was the aviation battalion commander who deployed assets to Bolivia to conduct Operation Blast Furnace, these questions hit close to home.

By way of answering these questions, this article will look at the magnitude of the drug problem and its relationship to national security, at the actions that led to the decision to launch Blast Furnace, and at some key lessons learned during the operation. Finally, it offers recommendations for a future US Army role in the war on drugs. In addition to my personal experience with that operation, the article is based on numerous interviews conducted with key personnel in the drug policy arenas of the Office of the Vice President, Justice Department, Department of Defense, State Department, DEA, and the US Embassy, La Paz.

Is There Really a War Out There?

When we use the term war, we usually think of combat forces, either regular or irregular, engaged in a shooting competition directly related to the national security of one or more participants. Just what is the war on international drug trafficking, and is there a threat to national security?

We need to start by looking at some facts about drug trafficking and the magnitude of this multibillion-dollar business. First, how bad is the use of illicit drugs in the United States?

• In March 1987, the State Department presented these estimates of the number of users or addicts in the United States: marijuana, 20 million; cocaine, 4 to 5 million; heroin, 500,000.[2]

• In terms of the dollar value of illegal drugs brought into the United States each year (some $70 billion), narcotics rank second to petroleum as the largest import.[3] (And you thought our trade deficit was bad enough already!)

• US consumption of cocaine is estimated at well over 70 tons annually, and DEA is seizing about 35 to 40 metric tons per year.[4]

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• The number of cocaine users is estimated to increase at a rate of ten percent annually.[5]

• The US resources dedicated to combating international drug trafficking are substantial: $60.2 million in 1986; $118.5 million in 1987; and a projected $98.7 million in 1988 (reduced because of budget cuts).[6]

Second, where are these drugs coming from?

• 100 percent—every gram—of the cocaine and heroin and 85 percent of the marijuana consumed in the United States are imported.[7]

• There are several principal sources of the three major categories of illegal drugs imported into the United States. Most of the cocaine comes from Peru, Bolivia, and Colombia. Heroin and opium are imported from Mexico, Burma, Thailand, Laos, Pakistan, Iran, and Afghanistan. And most marijuana comes from Colombia, Jamaica, Belize, and Mexico. Some 15 percent of the marijuana consumed in the United States is grown domestically. In addition to the nations listed, many non-producing countries sanction the active transshipment of illegal drugs through their country or are involved in drug money laundering activities.[8]

• Forty percent of the cocaine smuggled into the United States comes from Bolivia.[9]

• The primary single supplier to the United States of both heroin and marijuana is Mexico.[10]

• Gross production of coca leaves (the raw product from which cocaine is extracted) in both Peru and Bolivia is estimated to have increased at an annual rate of five to ten percent during this decade.[11]

• Much of the marijuana grown in the United States is grown in our national parks, making identification of the grower difficult. The growers have even placed dangerous boobytraps in some of these public lands.[12]

Third, the relationship between drug traffickers and terrorists or insurgent groups is a key factor linking drugs to national security. It is not an easy task to identify just how these groups are related or how strong are their bonds. In Colombia, the insurgent organizations M19 and FARC (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia) have provided physical security to drug traffickers at their production facilities (cocaine laboratories, airfields, growing sites for coca and marijuana) in addition to being their trigger men to carry out reprisals against the government for their efforts to fight drug trafficking. Similar links are believed to exist between terrorists and traffickers in Peru and other countries.

While the exact nature of these relationships may be unclear (are they simply a marriage of convenience at local levels, i.e. a swap of security for money, or are they well-organized relationships at the national/international level for a common purpose?), the evidence is clear that they have had and continue to have a tremendous impact on the governments, economies, and societies of producing, supporting, and recipient countries alike.

One of the most publicized drug/terrorist powers is that in Colombia. In November 1985, some 60 members of M19 seized the Palace of Justice in Bogota. Their purpose was to destroy the records of some 200 key drug traffickers threatened with extradition to the United States and to show the Colombian government and people their inability to protect themselves from the terrorist activities of the M19. They took over 300 hostages and murdered 11 justices and many other people. In 1986, traffickers/terrorists assassinated several Colombian journalists, the former commandant of the Special Anti-Narcotics Police, a Supreme Court justice, other judges, police officers, and private citizens.[13] In 1987, an attempt was made on the life of the Colombian Ambassador to Hungary. In early 1988, the Colombian Attorney General was assassinated. While the Colombian government has courageously stood up to be counted in its fight against the drug/terrorist conglomerate during this decade, there are some serious indications that their will to withstand the severe pressures may be eroding. In 1987, kingpin Jorge Ochoa was released from jail, and the Colombian Supreme Court declared unconstitutional the treaty between the United States and Colombia that allowed the extradition of drug traffickers to the United States.

Over the last two years, police and military helicopters in Colombia have been struck by hostile fire some 15 times. In 1986 alone, narcotics police there suffered 58 casualties among its force of 1500.[14] Money and weapons are the primary payoffs from the drug traffickers to the terrorist/insurgent organizations. Sometimes they are paid in cocaine.

The relationship between traffickers and terrorists/insurgents is not always friendly. In the past year, there have been several exchanges of gunfire between the Sendero Luminoso (Shining Path) and traffickers in Peru as well as similar incidents between traffickers and insurgents in Colombia,[15] perhaps as a means of negotiating terms of extortion among criminals.

An additional, and perhaps more important, threat to national security is the corruption of governments, police forces, and militaries as a result of the huge payoffs that traffickers are glad to provide in return for favors and protection. Reportedly, about three years ago the primary drug lord in Bolivia offered to pay off that country's national debt (over 10 billion dollars' worth) in return for freedom of action within Bolivia. While that offer may have been openly rejected, there is no doubt that collaboration with drug traffickers by some government officials, police, and military personnel is a serious problem. A US journalist in Bolivia during Blast Furnace quoted a former Minister of Interior from a previous Bolivian government:

> The police are corrupt at every level. No wonder cocaine is not being seized. The traffickers almost certainly are being warned.... If you notice, there haven't been that many arrests either. President Paz is quite serious but he isn't getting too much cooperation from the National Police. He recently had to sack the

Police Commanding General and the Chief of the Narcotics Squad in Santa Cruz for obvious corruption.[16]

There are many other ways in which the drug problem harms US national security, both directly and indirectly. The actual use of drugs by military personnel has a direct effect on the readiness of US combat forces. And then there are the damages to our society: decayed morals, increased crime, the breakdown of family values, and the flight of drug money out of the United States all have national security implications.

To bring into clearer focus the national security implications of international drug trafficking, consider the definition of low-intensity conflict from JCS Pub 1:

> Low-intensity conflict is a limited politico-military struggle to achieve political, social, economic, or psychological objectives. It is often protracted and ranges from diplomatic, economic, and psycho-social pressures through terrorism and insurgency. Low-intensity conflict is usually confined to a geographic area and is often characterized by constraints on the weaponry, tactics, and the level of violence.[17]

The influence of drug traffickers, with their ties to terrorists and insurgent organizations, on governments, economies, police forces, militaries, and populations as a whole is indeed a form of low-intensity conflict. It is a struggle waged by the drug dealers against established governments and societies to achieve political, social, economic, and psychological objectives. It is clear that a war is going on, and the trafficker continues to hold the upper hand. And guess who funds *both* sides of this war? The US government spends in the vicinity of $100 million annually to fight against the traffickers and to help some 100 countries to counter the threat.[18] Meanwhile, the US public spends some $70 billion annually to support the international drug network as consumers smoke, snort, and shoot themselves into oblivion.

In consideration of the threat, on 11 April 1986 President Reagan signed a National Security Decision Directive on Narcotics and National Security. He directed a number of important actions, four of which are key to this discussion:[19]

- Full consideration of drug control activities in our foreign assistance planning.
- An expanded role for US military forces in supporting counternarcotics efforts.
- Additional emphasis on narcotics as a national security issue in discussions with other nations.
- Greater participation by the US intelligence community in supporting efforts to counter drug trafficking.

In the January 1988 issue of *Military Review*, focusing on the dimensions of low-intensity conflict and military operations short of war, Major General Gordon R. Sullivan stated, "We must seek to define the role of the military in a sort of competition that uses force, but which, by its very nature, is dominated by nonmilitary considerations."[20] President Reagan's NSDD on Narcotics and National Security, by expanding the role of US military forces in counter-narcotics efforts, could not have anticipated better the non-traditional role for the military that General Sullivan describes.

Paving the Way for Blast Furnace

The Posse Comitatus Act of 1878 restricted the military from involvement in civilian law enforcement matters.[21] A hundred years later, in 1981, a change to Title 10, US Code, clarified the military's authority to support federal law enforcement agencies, with the following stipulations applying to participation in narcotics control operations:[22]

- The military may loan equipment, facilities, and people.
- Military personnel may operate military equipment used in monitoring and communicating the movement of air and sea traffic.
- Military personnel may operate military equipment in support of law enforcement agencies in an interdiction role overseas only if a joint declaration of emergency, signed by the Secretary of State, Secretary of Defense, and Attorney General, states that a serious threat to US interests exists.
- The military may not conduct searches or seizures or make arrests (even when an emergency declaration is in effect).
- Use of the military cannot adversely affect readiness.

While it may appear that this 1981 change to Posse Comitatus opened the door to the military, it generally had the opposite effect in that the DOD often used the readiness caveat as a reason for staying out of the drug business. US Representative Tommy Robinson, recognizing the severity of the drug trafficking problem and a reluctance on the part of DOD to be a full partner in countering it, said, "Without the military, we are not going to make a dent."[23]

President Reagan's NSDD in April further clarified direct involvement of US military forces by stipulating that, if they are to be used in an interdiction role overseas, they must be (1) invited by the host government, (2) directed by US government agencies, and (3) limited to a support function.[24]

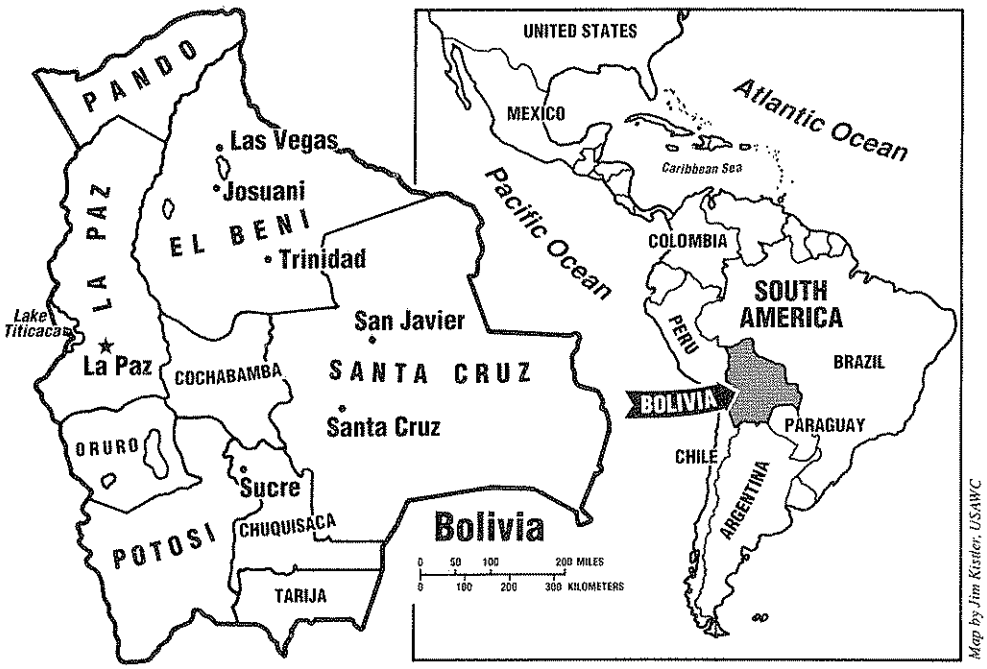
Not long after the NSDD, the National Drug Policy Board met to discuss doing something in either Colombia, Bolivia, or Peru.[25] Chaired by the Attorney General, the board included representatives from the National Narcotics Border Interdiction System (Office of the Vice President), the Bureau of International Narcotics Matters (State Department), the Drug Enforcement Administration (Justice Department), and the DOD Task Force on Drug Enforcement. Bolivia, in central South America, was picked for several reasons:

(1) The president of Bolivia felt he was losing control of his country to drug traffickers; (2) Bolivia was on the verge of being decertified by the US government for failure to make any progress in drug eradication efforts; (3) Colombia and Peru each had an organic military capability to counter drug traffickers whereas Bolivia had neither the capability, the money, nor the know-how; and (4) The terrorist threat in Bolivia was less than that in the other countries. Simultaneously, key personnel in the US Embassy, La Paz (Ambassador, Deputy Chief of Mission, Military Group Commander, DEA representatives), developed plans for use of the military in a combined counterdrug operation, and coordinated the concept with the government of Bolivia.[26] An operations concept and rules of engagement, refined in Washington, led to the signing of a joint declaration of emergency.

Vice President Bush personally provided the momentum to get the multiple departments and agencies united and moving in what was soon to become known as Operation Blast Furnace.[27]

A New Beginning—Blast Furnace

Blast Furnace was not the first use of a military unit in a drug interdiction operation (two US Air Force helicopters had previously supported DEA for a short period in the Bahamas, as had two Army helicopters from the 160th Aviation Battalion), but it was the first publicized employment of a US Army combat force on the sovereign soil of another country to conduct a combined counterdrug operation. For USSOUTHCOM and the 193d Infantry



Brigade (Panama), it was a short-notice requirement with little information and lots of questions. It began with a coordination meeting in Panama, 5 July 1986, with the DEA representative and MILGROUP commander from the US Embassy, La Paz. They originally envisioned the use of two or three helicopters for a period of approximately 60 days to transport Bolivian narcotics police (UMOPAR) to some 56 targets, possible cocaine production laboratories. To provide for sustainability, security, operational flexibility, and a high probability of success, a self-contained task force package was developed that included six Blackhawk helicopters.

Task Force Janus, a joint organization consisting of approximately 170 personnel, had a brief mission statement: provide air transportation to Bolivian police, under the direction of DEA, in order to interrupt the production of cocaine for a period of 60 days. DEA was the operating agency, and TF Janus was in support. As already noted, the US Ambassador had overall responsibility for the program.

The deployment concept called for the Blackhawks to be transported via a US Air Force C5 to the central Bolivian city of Santa Cruz (which had the only C5-capable airfield) on 15 July 1986, be reassembled, and self-deploy to a forward operating base (a drug trafficker's ranch confiscated by DEA/UMOPAR the previous year) nearly 400 miles to the north. Two days later, the main body deployed via five USAF C130s to a Bolivian air force base at the city of Trinidad and established a rear operating base.

The operational concept of Blast Furnace was to establish a fixed rear operating base and mobile forward operating bases from which strike missions would be conducted on targets suspected of being potential cocaine laboratories. The helicopter maintenance capability and the intelligence center would be located at the rear base while the strike force (three helicopters, Bolivian police, and some DEA agents) would work out of the forward bases of Josuani, Las Vegas, and San Javier during all but the last two weeks of the operation. Some strikes would also be conducted from the rear base itself.

When the C5 with the Blackhawks first landed at Santa Cruz, a small crowd, including representatives of both the US and the Bolivian press, awaited their "low key" arrival. Who leaked the deployment to the press is not known, but it had a significant effect. The hope of gaining a few days of surprise operations before the drug infrastructure could figure out how to react to the US military's presence was shattered. It is estimated that some 200 drug traffickers fled to Panama and another 600 to Paraguay in a matter of days.[28] During the operations to follow, never was a strike force fired upon as it hit a potential lab site, nor were any traffickers found at actual coke labs. Had Blast Furnace taken place in Colombia, a lab discovery likely would have been accompanied by a fire fight.

Blast Furnace was eventually extended an additional 60 days, making it a total of four months before TF Janus was closed down in mid-November

1986. The force returned home (most of the personnel and organizations were stationed in Panama; however, some were stationed at Army and Air Force installations in the United States) with an aura of pride in having successfully completed a long and difficult mission unlike any other that the Army had been called upon to perform in the past. The personnel involved received invaluable, realistic training in air assault operations, logistics, intelligence analysis, and planning. To look beyond that, however, was Blast Furnace more than a good training exercise? Did it make any difference in the overall scheme of international drug trafficking? Was it the answer to defeating supply-side drugonomics?

A Blast Furnace Assessment

To determine whether Blast Furnace was a success requires defining success. The various departments and agencies of the federal government that deal in drug matters have yet to agree on an acceptable measure of progress in combating the illicit drug trade.

If success is defined in terms of Blast Furnace's original objective—i.e. the disruption of cocaine production in Bolivia for 60 days—then the operation was a resounding success during that short term in which the US military force was physically in country. Evidence of this disruption is the fact that the local price of a hundred pounds of coca leaves fell from $125 to $15, about $20 to $25 less than the cost of growing and harvesting the coca leaves. In addition, some 800 traffickers were estimated to have fled the country during that period. On the other hand, as soon as the US military pulled out of Bolivia, the disruption disappeared and the price of coca leaves climbed to a level just short of its pre-Blast Furnace price. The disruption of production had no apparent long-term effect.

If success is defined in terms of kilos of cocaine seized and arrests made, then Blast Furnace was a failure. There was a tendency, if not pressure, to fall into a body-count mindset as the operation progressed, i.e. the number of labs found became a measurement tool. Indeed, midway through the operation the body-count enthusiasts began chalking up the discoveries of "transshipment points," locations where coke from one or more labs was brought for further shipment to another destination, either in or out of country. The discovery of a transshipment point was virtually meaningless, however, as the location was no more than an isolated airstrip. The body-count method of determining success is probably the least useful (both in the country of origin and in the air/sea/land border interdiction campaign) because the rate of production of all illegal drug crops continues to increase faster than the rate of interdiction or eradication efforts.

Perhaps one of the key successes of Blast Furnace was the resolve and commitment shown by the United States to do *something* about the drug

trade. It demonstrated the ability of the US military, DEA, other US government agencies, and the Bolivian police to cooperate successfully in a combined effort to fight drug traffickers, even though it was a short-lived fight.

Blast Furnace was also a success in terms of demonstrating the operational stamina and adaptability of all elements that participated in the task force operation. The primitive environment and limited resources available stretched their ingenuity as they sought ways to make things work in spite of the challenges. The fact that not one Army helicopter mishap occurred during the four months and 1200 flying hours adds to the successful validation and confidence-building experience.

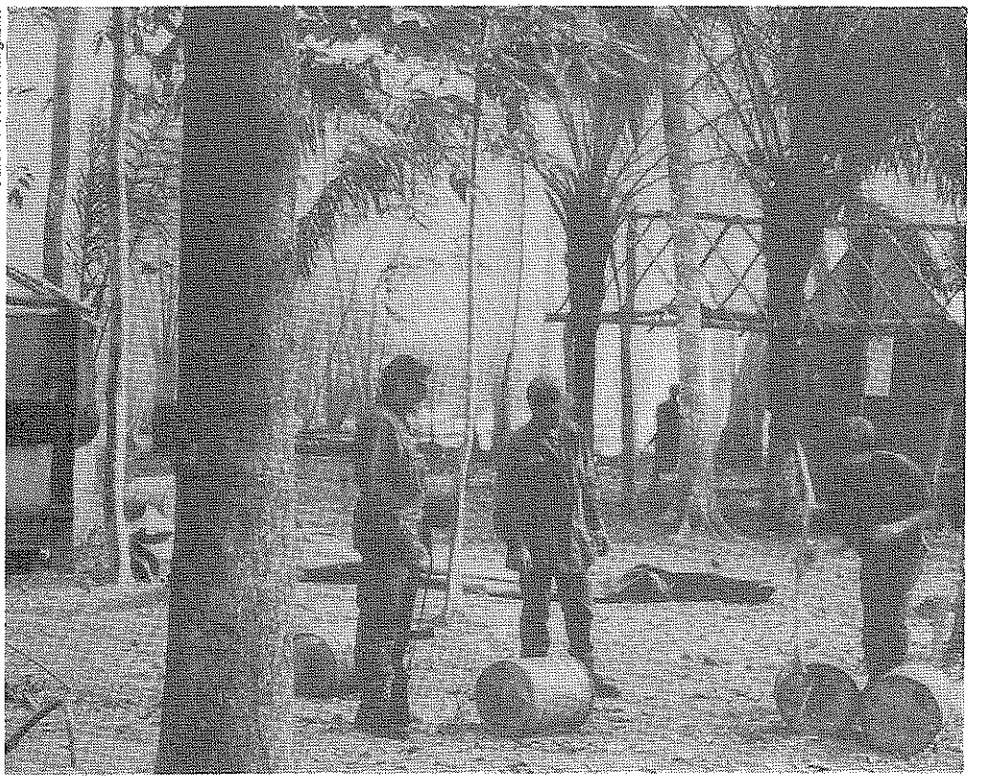
As a follow-on effort when TF Janus departed Bolivia, US Army instructor pilots and aircraft mechanics began training Bolivian air force personnel to fly and to maintain six UH-1 helicopters on loan to Bolivia from the US State Department, preliminary to performing strike operations with UMOPAR and DEA agents. Jeff Biggs, the Deputy Chief of Mission at the US Embassy in La Paz during Blast Furnace, subsequently remarked that ideally the UH-1s should have been provided to Bolivia and the Bolivian crews trained before the operation so that the Bolivian air force could have conducted combined strike operations with the US task force; that procedure would have left behind a more qualified and experienced Bolivian capability after the operation.

Biggs also stated that a long-term reduction in cocaine production would have required simultaneous strikes against remote mountain coca paste labs and a sustained Blast Furnace effort extending up to two years. In my own view, this highlights two of the basic problems with US national policy toward countering the drug trade in these countries of origin. First, the resources committed to the effort (people, equipment, dollars) are far too few to have anything but a token effect. Second, if we are unwilling to commit to a long-term solution, we may achieve a few short-term victories but will not win the war. In this light, Blast Furnace seems to have been little more than a costly, short-term political statement that quickly lapsed into oblivion because its effect on the international drug trade was virtually nonexistent.

Blast Furnace was not without political cost to the government of Bolivia. President Victor Paz Estenssoro received heavy criticism within his own country for having allowed foreign military forces to impose on sovereign Bolivian soil and to conduct "military operations" against Bolivian citizens. Other criticism came from the Organization of American States, Cuba, and other Latin countries.[29] The combined pressure on the Bolivian President was so intense that there was serious concern in the United States that the government of Bolivia might topple as a result.[30]

Corruption is a topic few people want to address openly, but it is a great frustration to all US agencies and organizations involved in combating the international drug trade. Every DEA agent working anywhere in the world

DEA and Soldiers magazine



Bolivian soldiers destroy chemicals seized at a captured cocaine production laboratory. Part of the site burns in the background.

is confronted with this minefield as he tries to work with local governments, law enforcement agencies, and militaries in a spirit of cooperation and common interests. Corruption is easier to talk about than it is to prove in court.

Indicators of corruption were certainly present during Blast Furnace. One of those indicators concerned the destruction of cocaine laboratories. When a lab was discovered, the plan was to take out any items that could be used by the UMOPAR, then set fire to the lab. A lab consisted of 10 to 20 wooden frame structures with canvas tarps and all the food, supplies, and chemicals necessary to sustain life and convert coca paste into cocaine hydrochloride. A civilian Bolivian prosecutor was required to document the lab and give permission for the UMOPAR to destroy it.

The largest lab discovered, designated target #157 close to the Brazilian border, housed some 800 to 1000 barrels of chemicals (many were empty) used in the process of converting coca paste to cocaine. There were so many barrels (ether, acetone, and hydrochloric acid) that an odor of ether hung in the dense jungle and gave headaches to some of the crew members. Destruction of the lab became a matter of attention reaching to the Bolivian Minister of Interior. Concern was expressed that a massive fire fueled by all

the chemicals might get out of control. A US military explosive ordnance disposal team was flown in from Panama, assessed the situation, and assured the US Ambassador that a safe, self-contained destruction could be accomplished. Six weeks later, when TF Janus departed Bolivia, permission had still not been given by the Minister of Interior to destroy this choice find.

There were other strong indicators of corrupt influence in 1985 when DEA agents and UMOPAR tried to raid cocaine labs using Bolivian air force pilots flying one or two Bolivian helicopters. When the pilots were given a target to be struck, they often gave excuses for several days why they could not conduct the mission. When they finally did mount the strike, the labs were found to have been abandoned no more than a day or two earlier. One drug trafficker, in discussing with a US journalist the fact that the United States was sending six UH-1 helicopters on long-term loan following Blast Furnace, remarked, "It's of no concern. The impetus will die with the departure of the Americans. The [Bolivian] military are not committed to fighting this major source of national income."[31] In another comment, this one by Alex Arteaga, a representative of the National Democratic Action Party in Bolivia's National Congress, the imputation of corruption was directed toward the police forces themselves: "There are high-level people who make the decisions in the national police that are corrupt, so that information [on upcoming operations] is going to the narcos" before the raids are made.[32] It would seem nigh impossible to carry out an effective counterdrug program in any country whose government, police, and military are sometimes antagonists rather than partners in the effort.

Perhaps a final assessment of Blast Furnace lies in the question, "Will there be another similar operation sometime in the future?" The answer within the community of organizations dealing with drug matters in Washington, to include DOD, lies somewhere between a wishy-washy "Unlikely" to an emphatic "No!" There are several reasons why a "son of Blast Furnace" will not likely occur: (1) It is very expensive in comparison to the potential return; (2) There is likely to be no real payoff when it is all over; and (3) No country is likely to ask the US military to come and play in its backyard, because the political price is too heavy.

The Defense Department's official view of the role of military forces in the drug war is "to provide support so that civilian law enforcement agencies can make the necessary searches, seizures, and arrests."[33]

A Year and a Half After Blast Furnace

When TF Janus left Bolivia, as already noted, mobile training teams came in to train Bolivian air force helicopter crews to fly the six UH-1s lent to them by the United States. The subsequent strike operations against cocaine laboratories have not progressed as well as the United States had hoped.

Nevertheless, there have been a few highly successful strikes in which major labs were discovered and destroyed, arrests were made, and several hundred kilos of cocaine were seized. Further, a US Special Forces team was sent to Bolivia in April 1987 to provide key training to the UMOPAR to increase their capabilities in counterdrug operations. Also, an intelligence specialist from US Army Forces, Southern Command, was placed in the US Embassy, La Paz, to continue work with DEA agents.

Unfortunately, other indications suggest that the drug war in Bolivia is slackening. On 27 October 1986, President Reagan signed public law 99-570, an Anti-Drug Abuse Act which requires the President to certify to Congress that major drug-producing and drug-cooperating countries during the previous year fully cooperated with the United States regarding the taking of adequate steps on their own to reduce drug production, trafficking, and money laundering.[34] Foreign assistance is directly tied to the certification requirement. The government of Bolivia failed to meet mandated eradication quotas in 1986 and 1987, and, as a result of being decertified, lost $8.7 million in fiscal year 1988 security assistance funds and about the same amount in fiscal year 1987.[35] (These funds are unrelated to State's International Narcotics Matters funds, which continue to be provided specifically for counterdrug programs.)

Another disappointment in Bolivia occurred in July 1987. Thousands of coca growers blocked roads while staging demonstrations against the government over the presence of the US Special Forces team and the government's efforts to destroy coca plants. The Bolivian government accused traffickers of promoting and financing the demonstrations; nevertheless, the government partially gave in to the Federation of Peasants of the Tropics when it stated that it would focus anti-narcotics efforts on the traffickers rather than the growers.[36] This concession assures that the 1986 plan drafted by the Bolivian government to rid their country of cocaine trafficking in three years is defunct.

Since Blast Furnace, DEA and the other US government organizations that routinely track and seize illegal drug shipments entering the United States through the Caribbean Basin have seized record quantities of cocaine.[37] Yet today there is a virtual glut of cocaine on the market.

A Suggestion for Future Army Involvement

The Department of Defense continues to emphasize its support role in the counterdrug arena, and in fact that role has shown some increases. Six additional UH-1s have been offered to the State Department, to be distributed equally to Peru, Colombia, and Ecuador, along with pilot training to be conducted by the US Army Aviation School at Ft. Rucker. The Army has been operating two to three UH-60s in the Bahamas, carrying Bahamian police and DEA agents to arrest traffickers as they land at remote airstrips. The Georgia

National Guard has conducted photo and visual reconnaissance flights with OV-1 aircraft. Air defense Hawk radars from Ft. Bliss, Texas, have deployed along the Mexican border from time to time as well as Army engineer units. Most recently, some Army National Guard units have entered the fray.

Each of these efforts pales against the magnitude of the international drug trade. It is time to propose some better suggestions for DOD and, more specifically, Army involvement that could lead to significant long-term victories in the drug war.

Two areas provide opportunities for DOD interaction with other government drug agencies: interdiction on the air, land, and sea borders, and of course elimination of production means in the countries of origin.

A look at the various conveyances used to smuggle illegal drugs into the United States further helps to refine the DOD role in interdiction. The following table reflects those conveyances in terms of percent of volume of drugs actually seized in 1986:[38]

	Cocaine(%)	Marijuana(%)	Heroin(%)
General Aviation	48	5	-
Commercial Air	11	2	5
Commercial Sea Vessels	13	4	87
Non-Commercial Sea Vessels	23	83	-
Land Transportation	5	6	8

For each of the three major drugs, land transportation accounts for a very small volume seized and should be left to the appropriate civilian agencies (Border Patrol, DEA, Immigration, and Customs). Commercial air and sea conveyances account for a fourth of the cocaine and most of the heroin imports. Again, civilian law enforcement agencies are appropriate. Noncommercial watercraft and general aviation account for nearly three-fourths of the cocaine and marijuana imports. This arena is most suitable to Coast Guard, Navy, and Air Force participation with civilian law enforcement agencies. The surveillance, early warning, and intercept requirements of an air and sea drug-interdiction program are aligned with wartime missions and capabilities of these services and present a training opportunity for them.

The elimination of the means of production is the arena where the Army can most appropriately contribute. However, that does not necessarily mean the encroachment of combat units upon the sovereignty of a foreign country, as was arguably the case in Bolivia.

The drug infrastructure in a major producing country must not be thought of as a criminal problem affecting private citizens, thus falling to the responsibility of police forces alone. Rather, it must be viewed as an insurgency, targeting the very security of the nation itself, for which the government, police, and military forces must accept combined responsibility. The corruptive influence on the government, coupled with the real physical threat against the government, fully justifies the development of a counterinsurgency-type

The drug infrastructure in a producing country must be viewed as an insurgency, targeting the security of the nation, for which the government, police, and military must accept responsibility.

approach. Colombia is fighting a losing battle against drug trafficking because of the drug-related terrorist activity directed against every element of its government. Bolivia is fighting a losing battle because of the financial influence the traffickers maintain over the peasant growers and the infiltration of drug corruption throughout various levels of the government. The drug infrastructure is an insurgent, not a criminal, problem.

The US Army's participation in the war on drugs must be in the security assistance role. There are, of course, obstacles to this approach. One is the nightmare of the Vietnam experience, which "seems to loom large in the national subconscious, making the public nervous about any future commitments."[39] The security assistance program established in El Salvador still evokes the spectre of Vietnam in the minds of many people today.

A second and closely related obstacle is the reluctance of the American people, if not the government itself, to get entangled in a long-term problem, one that cannot be solved overnight by throwing a single-appropriation lump sum of money at it. Eradication of drug production will require staying for the long haul. Anything less than total commitment will simply result in short-term suppression, not elimination.

A third obstacle is cost. Security assistance programs throughout Latin America have been declining over the past several years. Presently, only three countries receive any security assistance in all of Latin America: El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala. An effective counterdrug security assistance program would require that big bucks be programmed within the Military Assistance Program, the International Military Education and Training Program, and the Economic Support Fund. Such programs would also require the commitment of congressional appropriations committees over the long term.

If the US government considers the war on drugs to be more than just political rhetoric—and that's a big if—it must make major efforts to decrease demand through education and to decrease supply through interdiction and eradication. It should use its diplomatic powers to negotiate the simultaneous initiation of comprehensive security assistance programs to counter drug trafficking in the three major producing countries in this hemisphere: Colombia, Mexico, and Bolivia. Peru should not be ignored, but the

Soviet influence there may make it more difficult to establish such a program in that country.

The type of security assistance program to be developed requires imagination and should not be bound by traditional thinking. Colonel Richard H. Taylor has correctly reminded us that "military operations short of war do not mean business as usual."[40] This statement is equally applicable to the development of a counterdrug security assistance program. It must be built upon an interagency community unlike any other organization, incorporating military, police, intelligence, investigative, agricultural, political, civil affairs, information media, and PSYOPS organizations, all with a common purpose: to destroy the drug infrastructure and its means of producing illicit drugs while substituting other means of livelihood for the affected peasant growers.

The Army needs to play a key role in this effort, far beyond simply "supporting law enforcement agencies." Security assistance programs are traditionally the responsibility of the State Department. However, the Army appropriately should be the operating agency in the program being suggested because of its capabilities in the areas of planning, logistics, and command/control/communications/intelligence.

The intelligence community, both military and government, can play a significant role in breaking up a drug infrastructure. John Stewart's comment concerning the importance of military intelligence in a low-intensity conflict environment is also valid in counterdrug security assistance:

> In [low-intensity conflict], where the enemy avoids direct confrontation and where he may be trying to avoid US forces altogether by waiting out their withdrawal, [military intelligence] becomes a key means for maintaining momentum. By seeking out key insurgent leaders and agitators and identifying supply points and base areas, [military intelligence] is the key to keeping the enemy off balance and preempting his plan of action.[41]

The security assistance program must include training programs for both police (presently unauthorized under US laws) and military forces alike. Both military and civilian equipment may have to be provided, such as aircraft, riverine boats, secure communications, radars, night vision devices, etc.

Investigative and intelligence resources must be teamed to identify drug corruption where possible and to allow the US ambassadors and their representatives to use their diplomatic channels to communicate that information to appropriate levels. Ethics and integrity within the officer corps of the military and police forces must be addressed where found to be a problem, as it continues to be addressed in El Salvador.

Civil affairs and PSYOPS teams must work with host-nation media to mobilize support against the drug infrastructure and for the government. Drug crop eradication efforts must combine the resources of the intelligence community, police forces, and military. Crop-duster aircraft for herbicidal

missions must be made available to implement an effective eradication program and may even need to be armed.

Periodic combined joint military training exercises—as are now conducted in Ecuador and Bolivia, and have been conducted in the past in Panama and Colombia—could be planned in countries where counterdrug security assistance programs are indicated. The exercises could be built around a counterdrug scenario and include combined operations against production means for a two-week duration. This cannot become a substitute for a solid security assistance program, but it might be a useful supplement to one.

The security assistance approach need not and should not be limited to a US initiative. The drug trade is an international cancer that knows no boundaries. There are a number of organizations within the United Nations that work in the narcotics area: the UN Fund for Drug Abuse Control, the International Narcotics Control Board, the International Criminal Police Organization (Interpol), and the Division on Narcotics Drugs. These organizations should be encouraged to work with the United States in creating international counterdrug security assistance programs.

Summary

The influence of the international drug traffickers, along with their terrorist supporters, is clearly a threat to the national security interests of producing, supporting, and recipient countries alike. It breeds corruption at every level of government and society; it crosses every ethnic, social, and financial boundary without preference.

The solutions are not easy, but the alternative of indifference or passivity is unacceptable. The United States must come to grips with this threat and attack it at every level. An economy-of-force approach in dollars and people will never make a difference. Commitment to the long-haul solution, with the necessary funding, cannot be avoided. US military forces have the potential to contribute much more to the fight than they presently are. Service participation should be viewed as an opportunity to enhance training, not as an enforced diversion which degrades readiness. Blast Furnace, perhaps derived out of the frustration of watching the drug trade continue to increase in spite of other government efforts to curb it, was at least an effort to do something. It was only a short-lived success, but it did generate a lot of thought across interagency boundaries concerning future counterattacks in the US war on drugs.

NOTES

1. Caption is paraphrased.
2. US Department of State, Bureau of International Narcotics Matters, *Coordinator for Narcotics Affairs Handbook*, March 1987, p. 4. (Hereinafter referred to as "*Narcotics Affairs.*")
3. Ibid.

4. Interview with Lieutenant Colonel Ron Merriott, USAF, Bureau of International Narcotics Matters, Washington, 3 December 1987.

5. *Narcotics Affairs*, appendix B, p. 3.

6. US Department of State, Bureau of International Narcotics Matters, *International Narcotics Control Strategy Report*, March 1987, p. 10. (Hereinafter referred to as "*Narcotics Control Strategy.*")

7. *Narcotics Affairs*, p. 4.

8. Ibid.

9. "White Powder War," *Soldiers*, November 1986, pp. 14-20.

10. *Narcotics Control Strategy*, p. 19.

11. Ibid., p. 3.

12. Interview with Commander Craig Coy, USN, Office of the Attorney General, National Drug Policy Board, Washington, 24 November 1987.

13. *Narcotics Control Strategy*, p. 14.

14. Ibid., p. 15, and interview with Lieutenant Colonel Fabio Zapata, Colombian air force, Commander of Colombian Helicopter Forces, 13 May 1986.

15. Interview with Coy.

16. "Army Blackhawks in Bolivia: US Cracks Down on Cocaine," *Soldier of Fortune*, June 1987, pp. 62-65.

17. US Department of Defense, *Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms*, JCS Pub 1, 1 June 1987, p. 214.

18. *Narcotics Affairs*, p. 1.

19. National Narcotics Border Interdiction System, "Seminar on How to Maximize Access to Military Resources," Washington, 26 October 1987.

20. Gordon R. Sullivan, "From the Deputy Commandant," *Military Review*, 68 (January 1988), 3.

21. Paul Jackson Rice, "New Laws and Insights Encircle the Posse Comitatus Act," Individual Study Project, US Army War College, Carlisle Barracks, Pa., 26 May 1983, p. 4.

22. Ibid., pp. 22, 25.

23. "Weinberger: Proposed Drug Role 'Absurd,'" *Air Force Times*, 29 September 1986, p. 3.

24. *Narcotics Control Strategy*, p. 36.

25. Interview with Lieutenant Colonel Ron Layton, Office of the Vice President, National Narcotics Border Interdiction System, Washington, 24 November 1987.

26. Interview with Jeff Biggs, former Deputy Chief of Mission, US Embassy, La Paz, conducted in Washington, 3 December 1987.

27. Interview with Dave Westrate, Deputy Director, Drug Enforcement Administration, 18 November 1987.

28. "White Powder War," *Soldiers*, p. 19.

29. Interview with Biggs.

30. Interview with Westrate.

31. "Army Blackhawks in Bolivia," *Soldier of Fortune*, pp. 62-65.

32. David Fulghum, "Raids Cut Coca-Growing Profits," *Army Times*, 1 September 1986, p. 42.

33. Lieutenant General Stephen G. Olmsted, USMC, Director, DOD Task Force on Drug Enforcement, "Statement Before the Subcommittee on Investigations, House Committee of Armed Services," 23 July 1987, p. 2.

34. *Narcotics Control Strategy*, p. 1.

35. Interview with Colonel Bob Brown, Drug Enforcement Administration, Washington, 18 November 1987.

36. "Bolivians Fight Efforts to Eradicate Coca," *The New York Times*, 27 July 1987, p. 3.

37. Interview with Westrate.

38. National Narcotics Intelligence Consumers Committee, *The NNICC Report 1985-1986*, June 1987, pp. 10, 43, 73.

39. William J. Olson, "Organizational Requirements for LIC," *Military Review*, 68 (January 1988), 9.

40. Richard H. Taylor, "What Are These Things Called 'Operations Short of War'?" *Military Review*, 68 (January 1988), 5.

41. John F. Stewart, "Military Intelligence Operations in Low-Intensity Conflict: An Organizational Model," *Military Review*, 68 (January 1988), 25.